1955

outposts

28

CONTRIBUTORS

NORMAN MACCAIG
KENNETH BEAUDOIN
CAROL HOGBEN
D. J. ENRIGHT
GEOFFREY RICHMAN
THOMAS BLACKBURN
SYLVIA READ
HENRY BIRNBAUM
IAN MUDIE
WILBER STEVENS

N. K. CRUIKSHANK
L. E. CRAIGIE
LAWRENCE SPINGARN
FRANCIS NEWBOLD
DOROTHY STRINGER
D. U. RATCLIFFE
LAWRENCE LIPTON
DEREK STANFORD
B. EVAN OWEN
ANTHONY NEWMAN

NORMAN MACCAIG

Country Morning

FROM this conformity of field and cloud
Comes what my human failure recognises
As the stepped down from the crucifix, the perfect,
The fact incinerated in its own airs and graces
And in that burning losing that lovely dross
And gaining its total from the total loss.

Field and bare tree and crying rook compose
An emphasis of space, and space considers
Them no intrusion, but a part, too, of what
The little stream sounds round its little boulders—
Each shows the hidden, to the essential sight,
As skeletal constructions of the light.

Uninterrupted meaning does not fill
But is what lies outside me and so carries
My own conformity that distance further
That I am meaning too, and without crisis
Or rhythm or repetition lean on this door,
A land discovered there's no need to explore.

Lapwing tumbling above the ploughland is
Interior enough. One morning's gesture
Breaks through the glass wall of the possible
And a new space rushes in, to overmaster
The ordinary conquests of the eye
With this grass blade and that no larger sky.

Measuring this with what remains of my
Failure to measure it is what enables
Such self-dividing statement as this is.
I throw such measurement away and, as it dwindles
Into myself, my speech ends and I lean
On the door that opens on what myself can mean.

KENNETH BEAUDOIN

Poem: being in the way of being a sonnet

A MAD man's moon follows me
tonight like the evil eye of destiny,
waiting for that one wrong moment when
to be free is to be again

at desperation's vortex. Wild,
unnatural moment of the beast's success
against all mind's conscientiousness,
mind's roots and leaves defiled

as with some final cloud—
Sun's decline shrieked aloud

like some strange fear
too shrill for mortal ear

which only wives of storm-lost sailors know,
which only sounds where sorrows grow.

U.S.A.

CAROL HOGBEN

Pilgrims' Way

SUCH chains of love ride summer lanes
From top to bottom of the hill.
The dust is old philosophies,
The path is immemorial.

Hot April fools all ride this way,
On withers glistening with sweat;
Their laughter drifts over the fields
To die by nightfall intestate.

Beneath the hedge on either side
The clods of grass clutch mudded leaves,
And tag a score on maiden's hair
Which in its time seeds and conceives.

The strange thing is the privacy
The mist of centuries preserves;
Each pageant moment, richly felt,
Trots in the distance with a clop of hooves.

D. J. ENRIGHT

Population Problems

HOW they seem to press towards death!
The child who thrusts herself against the
level-crossing gate—
What sturdy ghosts are pressing at her back?
Even her mother starts to call too late.

The puppy, urgent in dreams for warmth or milk,
Drags that little bag of body in his haste
To the table's brink, to the fire's destruction.
The schoolboy, racing in his dangerous book,
Drives his cracking forehead forwards to
another crazy verb or perilous construction.

A silent impulse stains the waiting queue,
To fling them quietly beneath the nearing train.
Tall buildings tempt their builders by their
headlong walls;
Or love of nature leads these giddy lovers to
their falls,
To write upon the famous waters in their common blood.

Age sometimes teaches them, those who escape
The train, the fire, the sanatorium, the drop.
They stop, but not to think (a gift denied to hosts)—
Backwards they lean, already learn the part that
they must play as ghosts;
Warily stand aside, jostling the small statistics,
As they pass, of flesh and blood.

No census can divide the living from the dead.
Their masters are the same and one. As when the
spring floods use the rent and flinty bed.

Japan

GEOFFREY RICHMAN

A Simple Quantitive--Qualitative Change

WE felt it would not be amiss,
If we had a dozen mouths to kiss;
Talk of the passionate depths of bliss;
Was ever love like ours?

A hundred comforting hands to hold,
A thousand fingers to twine and mould,
Was the least (we said) for a love so bold;
Was ever love like ours?

A hundred acts of love each night,
To set our greedy flesh alight
And scald the bed with our delight;
Was ever love like ours?

The mutual vigour of our desire,
Its single minded seething fire,
Tied us together with a white hot wire;
Was ever love like ours?

And so the million needed parts
Grew at the wish of our teeming hearts,
Eager for a billion new loving arts;
Was ever love like ours?

So complicated love became
(No parts that clasped were ever the same)
Our minds transformed to suit our earthly frame;
Was ever love like ours?

New languages with words of giant power
We made, art purer than the rarest flower,
Built new skies, mountains, to pass a loving hour,
Was ever love like ours?

Alas! Such huge energy we spent, it led
To eating all day, yet never being fed,
We strained and burst, to an outer Galaxy fled;
Was ever love like ours?

Generations ponder the skies to pay
Respects to love that cannot die away
But grows brighter, gaze into starlight eyes and say
Is ever love like ours?

THOMAS BLACKBURN

Orpheus

WILD beasts and women sought this man
Whose trick of singing could unlock
Their moment for a breathing space
And let them wander through the clock
In shining brevities of grace.

The dog and harlot both achieved
Their royalties in his patterned sound,
Treading a bright imperial air
Above their rank, bloodsodden ground.
But as that white, denatured place
Died on them, for the voice was dumb,
Took back into themselves like Kings
Their exiled and appalling slum.

No wonder as the singing man
Grew wholly silent with his tears,
Sealed by gross habits of the blood
Within their blind, disfiguring heart,
They sought him in the rattling wood
And tore his lyre strings apart.

Now on a salt unbridled stream
His sacred essence walks abroad
Through cold futurities of dream
In hopeless and plutonian love.
The clouded animals of sense
Are troubled by that stricken eye
Their circles of experience
Rocked by a vagrant orphic cry.

SYLVIA READ

Pieta—by Giottino

TAKE down our world
Take our daylight down,
Eyes be shuttered
Filter dark alone.

Let the waves ride high,
Quick death to the hand,
Quick to quivering lips,
Fill the mouth with sand.

Over the wrecked heart
Let the tide break now,
Storm or wind blow through
Body of hull or prow.

Let the women come
In laughter or in tears
With children or alone,
This grief is theirs.

Here the world of woman
Mourns the loss of men,
Mourns each separate cross
Each undefended pain,

Offers her own heart
To take the cold flow
From the hunger of the dead,
To fill her flesh with snow.

Death would be a blessing
That He might not die;
Pain only a bird
Frozen in the sky.

Take down our world,
Our moon and our sun;
Hands hold your grief
Take your Lord down.

HENRY BIRNBAUM

Freudian Counterpoint

GENTLY swimming in time, in the soft time,
my liquid love wanders like a lit memory
across a formless sea within the sea of fear,
my seeing swirls in an orbit of day and night
like a mind naked among the cosmic gases.
Those times when I challenge the space of me,
as if my being were reflected from an image
perpendicular to my own, I make a curious pair.
Mirrors accept me more genuinely than I see,
and I lie down with my resemblances,
converged on the flatness of silvered surfaces
like stellar collisions from an inverted galaxy.
More often I am submerged in an ocean of me :
the sea is deeper than the depth of me,
and I tread in a wish outside my form;
wounded intuitions lie stratified on the shore
from which I swim gently, gently,
in a formless sea within the sea of fear.

U.S.A.

IAN MUDIE

The Fish-watcher

THE lift and fall and shift and drift
of seaweed with each slow swishing wave,
the smoke of stirred sand in shore shallows,
the uprooted tree,
betoken the storm
that last night lashed the sea.

The weed will rot on the shore,
the sand will settle, the water clear,
but never more shall we
see Tom the fisherman, knife and plug in hand
—watching for schools of fish to flash in sunshine—
sit and smoke all day beneath the tree.

Australia

WILBER STEVENS

Matinee of an Old Prompt Book

HATE is reason shuddering
Away the light of near farce
Dallying pity with will
And want with pity.

In hate there is fanning
Of loss and moment
Each servicing toward the throat
A cadence of bile for the absent stranger.

Hate is a dead guilt rioting
On God by craft.
Cloying at the private deluge
Hate is a saint looking back.

U.S.A.

N. K. CRUICKSHANK

The World's Welcome Home to Someone Who Almost Left It

THE prodigal has returned from the danger zone,
Returned to the smile-filled room, who went out alone!
Your mother can breathe again,
Your father wipe from his brow the look of strain;
Your married sisters can speak of you with love,
Cousins and family friends approve—
All, all be glad
That, in spite of Religion, you did nothing mad.

The lid has been screwed again on the ointment pot;
The perfume can now be sold and will fetch a lot,
To buy warm things for sundry deserving folk,
Obtain for them food and coal and coke.
The risk of waste, of appalling waste, is ended.
All's well that ends well. Least said soonest mended.
The prodigal has returned from the awesome wood
To be understood.

New hands will be born to keep the home fires burning,
New lovers to bear still more to keep us turning,
New props for the state, new ballast for the Church.
We who feared you might leave us in the lurch,
Who often said it would break your mother's heart
If you chose the feckless, ruthless escaper's part,
Can welcome, to bell-pealings,
One whom we have misjudged, who has hurt no loving feelings.

LAWRENCE SPINGARN

A Late Vision

SONG is no mortal sound alone :
The singer rages or runs cold,
Then hangs his heart beneath a stone.

Echo is but the song grown old.
Now my chill voice is echoing
In chambers where no passions hold :

I mean this white, this stricken globe—
Not what I spin beneath my hand
And farther than these eyes can probe

Past the furred foot, the frosty wing.
When all I trapped has turned, and flown
Beyond my net of reasoning

You stay, and staying understand
The burning bush, the seamless robe
That men call winter in this land.

U.S.A.

L. E. CRAIGIE

Stranger

AFTER this desert agony, he must deserve
to return where the sun illumes the gold and red
of flowers calmly; to escape the fever heat
of knowledge of death within the living nerve.

True, in a sense he never really left
the sane green world of gleams and shadows and shapes
like leaves, shading the words he spoke.
He belonged in spirit to what he had bereft,

yet somehow, quite divorced from hills and men
he wandered remote in a Sinai of the mind,
and like Eurydice sensed the frightful glory
through the waiting gates of the world, through which again

he must travel, when cleansed by fires and fears of fear.
I saw him passing; stranger, follower of death's
strong secrets, and feared with him, and knew
myself too weak for triumph bought so dear.

A Chinese dragon fought a wounded lion
upon the complex surface of my dream;
and somewhere behind it all, his tortured face
swam through the ripples of a jade-cool stream.

What it could mean I was not meant to know.
The challenge of this world seemed always death,
yet life, and colour, streams and trees and seas
meant something more after I'd seen him go.

The return may prove more painful than the exile :
yet he will come, the hollows of his soul
rounded to perfect knowledge of the shapes
of life and death. Forged will is never fragile.

Australia

FRANCIS NEWBOLD

Honeymooners

ARMS round each other, they pace the evening beach,
Her head, in woman's immemorial attitude
Of trust and dependence, curled upon his shoulder.
Theirs are the tawny sands, the fawning sea
That threats no tempest, the flamingo sky.
They are an island that includes the world

And their's the lover's immemorial attitude:
Unjustified faith draping the world's cold shoulder
In the comfort of illusion. Large as the sea,
Delusive as a shepherd's warning sky,
Their hope; they will not match the mastering world
But leave, as others, wrecks along Time's beach.

She, anchored to the home rock of his shoulder,
Floats on a drowsy biological sea
Of instinctual bliss. The unborn look from the sky,
In trepidation, at the beckoning world;
Her womb calls myriads from the heavenly beach—
Sad shivering souls in timid bathers' attitude.

He—yesterday mechanic, man of the sea,
Lawyer, to-day love's poet—head in the sky,
Through rosy clouds eyes a transfigured world,
Plays football with the stars along that beach,
Dreams generous dreams, strikes a Shelleyan attitude,
Wearing the ages' flower on his arrogant shoulder.

Somewhere, perhaps, beneath that innocent sky
Myrmidons of the princes of this world
Train their artillery on Eden's beach;
As presidents rehearse heroic attitudes
In the hall of mirrors, over his fluid shoulder
Evilly winks the Old Man of the Sea.

But they, oblivious to the sundering world,
Create eternity on an evening's beach,
In love's immortal, death-denying attitude.

DOROTHY STRINGER

X-Ray

THE nakedness, the blue anonymous smock
The cubicle, the mirror and the stool
Demand humility. This is no school
Of privilege : here the unhurrying clock
Leads to the black room with the red lamp burning;
The figure spotlit, eye-shaded and still;
The robot whose inquisitorial skill
Demands more bone, more tissue, thus discerning
With esoteric eye the seeds of death.

It wheels, it drops above the ordered bed;
Blocks out dim white of apron, lamp's dull red;
Drives back to labouring lungs the quickened breath,
While eye turns radiographer, and brain
Still conjures verse.
Only the heart
Foretells the fear and pain.

DOROTHY UNA RATCLIFFE

Penny Whistle

(for A. C. P.)

PLAINTIVE was the music of the penny whistle,
Played beside the dark rocks, high above a sea
Coloured like a harebell, veiled in misty sunlight;
Pipe again the plaintive lilt that there you piped for me,

Whilst a hidden rivulet tumbled with a tinkle
Under ivy trellises, where polypodies hide,
On the steep and stony track leading to the shore :
Pipe again the plaintive lilt, I'll hear the running tide.

Islands like blue petals dot the dim horizon,
Snowy-breasted tern dive where men are free and kind,
Where life flows slowly and ebbs like the ocean :
Pipe again the plaintive lilt, I'll feel the off-shore wind.

REVIEWS

Twigs as Varied Bent : James Boyer May (Villiers Publications 6s.).

CONVENTIONAL literary historians, like undertakers and lawyers, love nothing so much as to write *finis* to an "era". As embalmers and executors of the past they can thus evade the challenge of coming to grips with and committing themselves on the present and the future. Mr. May buries the past with reverence, lest it rise up to haunt us, but his eyes are on the present and the future. As editor of *Trace,* the Baedeker of the little magazine world, and himself a frequent contributor of poetry and criticism, Mr. James Boyer May has for many years played a role not unlike that of the early Ezra Pound's in little magazine circles. This book is based in large measure on this experience and on a survey of the field conducted by Mr. May and analysed by Mr. John Sankey in *Trace* No. 5.

Edited in the U.S. and published by Villiers in England, *Trace* has served as a transmission belt between both countries, and the rest of the English-speaking world. *Twigs* reveals a similar approach. Of the 225 little magazines listed in *Trace,* 75 are published in the U.S. and 41 in the U.K. Allowing for the proportionately larger U.S. population and the proportionately larger market for magazines and books in the U.K. (double that of the U.S., May says), he concludes that "fewer little magazines spring up in England". That "reading needs are better supplied by other media" in England, is one reason he gives. Another, that they tend to spring up where free expression is threatened, and England is "less advanced on the road to dictatorship" than the U.S. Also that they have sprung up "most thickly where exact sciences are more worshipped, providing so many counters to materialism".

Whether or not his statistical equations are sound (numbers and percentages have less bearing on his case than the *kind* of magazines that spring up) it is certainly true that the U.S. has produced one type of magazine that is relatively rare in England, the "workshop" type, devoted to *tendenz* and "wild" experimentation. "In fact, almost only in this country (U.S.) is this type to be found," and Mr. May names such examples as *Gambit, Four Winds, Diameter, Idiom* and "2½". They have always been shortlived and today there are few of them even in the U.S., even if one includes the expatriate ones in France and elsewhere.

On the other hand, the magazines that may be said to specialize as "counters to materialism" have been more common in England recently, where the neo-Romantics have at least a foothold. In the U.S. they have few outlets of their own, while the university quarterlies are for the most part closed to them, these being dominated by the neo-Classical and New Criticism group. Neo seems to be the favourite semantic gambit of young and old alike; terminologies die hard. As for the younger neo-academic poets, they appear to have been as successful in Britain as in the U.S. in moving straight from the classroom into the paying faculty jobs and editorships without any "wild" experimenting with literature, or with life either, thus solving the problem of print by the oldest of all devices. The French have a name for it but the American name for it is more printable : apple-polishing.

A better case for U.S. exceptionalism is afforded by the magazine with an unorthodox socio-political slant. Today this genre constitutes a kind of literary underground. With official and self-appointed private witch-burners snooping into schools, motion pictures, radio-television, newspapers, and most recently Funds and Foundations, the little magazines have so far escaped only because they print so much poetry. The cretins who compose these posses can't read poetry. Thus the failure of the schools to teach poetry properly, which so often brought down the wrath of Ezra Pound upon them, has become the poet's first line of defence. Some are already experimenting with the second line : the Fool's cap and bells.

All this is explicit and implicit in *Twigs,* which unlike the two previous books on the subject, aims to be a critical rather than merely encyclopedic or bibliographical. Written primarily from the writer's point of view, it nevertheless treats with meticulous fairness the university-sponsored reviews as well as those "with sharp shining white ideas or slow-burning angers", the frankly traditional ones, the radical throw-backs who are refighting the battles of the Twenties as well as the "conservative moderns" who are making fashionable *Kitsch* or academic quiz games out of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. He lets the editors have their say, and he sticks his own neck out in the best traditions of critical give and take. It is thus an indispensible guide to writers in search of submission know-how and know-where, but also a book that will make heated talk while the cocktails go flat, and start fires in many quarters where the vegetation has gone dry and no rain has fallen for a long time.

LAWRENCE LIPTON.

Unlucky Jonah: Philip Oakes (University of Reading, unpriced).
Descartes and the Animals: Bernard Bergonzi (Platform, 5s.).
Seasons and Situations: Maurice C. Cole (Guild Press, 2s.).
In the Beginning: Paul Casimir (Zebra Press, 1s.).

THERE is a new flatness in poetry, quite the fashion. Mr. Oakes is by no means a bad offender; but his verse could do with a stirring-up as others would benefit from a levelling-down. It is witty, reflective, intelligent, but its carriage lacks buoyancy and afflatus. When, as in *The Death of the Referee,* the poet draws on both rhythm and rhyme, the result convinces and surprises. Without either of these props (see *The Ballad of Captain May*), the poem slips away into casual utterance. On the other hand, when the language of the poem clings closely to the colloquial (v. *The Mediterranean Man*), it holds the attention of mind and ear. The conclusion of *Time and Cold Stone* displays the seriousness hidden in this poet.

With this collection of verses written between 1948 and 1954, Mr. Bergonzi stands revealed as an accomplished craftsman, a poet of competence. He is formal without stiffness, elegant without undue affectation, and master of a tidy mode of composition which does not preclude intensity (note the lyrical tightness of his poem *Simplicity*). The rhymed quatrain and the villanelle are two of his favourite structures, the latter of which he employs with great success. Mr. Bergonzi is also partial to the "pen-portrait" poem. *Anemones for Miss Austen, Homage à M. Mauriac, Aubrey Beardsley* and *Paul Klee* observe the sonnet rhyme-scheme but are not limited by a set metre. To a neat metaphysical intelligence (see the title poem of this collection, and *Ballade*), Mr. Bergonzi joins a social sense—something less preconceived than the idea of social justice which inspired the poets of the 'thirties (read *Victorian Houses, Sydenham Hill*). A good poet distributes his stresses of meaning over all parts of speech. "The black *sardonic* telephone/ *decides* it will not *sing* tonight" writes Mr. Bergonzi in *Ode,* surprising us—as my italics show—with two potent verbs and an adjective of merit. His direction is choice, economic and impressive.

Mr. Cole (born 1915) is not an easy poet to place. There is no emphatic unity of subject or treatment in his work. The themes he takes are various: a suicide, private prayer, a moonless night, boys hunting for conkers. Rhyme is helpful to this poet whose vision is without a sure outline of its own. Mr. Cole resorts to it quite a bit; but its full, as distinct from its near or half, use would

probably impart greater strength to his verse. The book contains good lines and phrases ("Spring again encircles sombre Europe", "The chimes of clocks nail in another day"), but Mr. Cole needs to watch his diction ("crimsonic resurrection" is a spraining of language). One poem, *Somebody Searches,* effectively distils a mood of mystery.

At his best Mr. Casimir (born 1922) is an attractive lyrical poet: there is something both simple and exotic about his work. He is drawn to the past: sometimes that of a century back, sometimes of a thousand years or so ago. The book contains two smooth regular pieces on William Blake and Thomas Chatterton; and the dedicatory poem to the poet's wife is a gay and graceful composition, with only two full stops in its twenty lines.

DEREK STANFORD.

Autumn Sequel: Louis MacNiece (Faber, 12s. 6d.).

The Pen in Exile: edited by Paul Tabori (International P.E.N. Club, 12s. 6d.).

IT was Mr. MacNiece who wrote, six years ago, "very few (critics) have any critical standards . . . they will not acquire such standards until they remember that poetry is made with *words*". There can be no argument about the truth of the second assertion, even though the first may be a rhetorical exaggeration. There are many critics who do not lack standards but, faced with consistent outpourings of competent mediocrity, lack the courage to apply them.

There are words enough in *Autumn Sequel,* stumbling along and stepping with pompous exaggeration over obstacles that are not there, crowding vociferously into bottle-necks and finding themselves lost in windy waste-lands. The result does not flatter Mr. MacNiece's development as a poet. Even as his *Autumn Journal* of 1938 was a rambling and rather commonplace evocation of the pre-Munich era, the Sequel is a rambling and commonplace evocation of the mood of the late 'forties and early 'fifties. There are words enough and to spare, but for two-thirds of the poem they would have been better employed as prose. Absence of real inspiration reduces many of the cantos to so much competent verbiage in slickly contrived rhythms saying absolutely nothing. Mr. MacNiece puts it like this: "To lop them off with a knife/In order to preserve them seems pure fake;/Day upon day, dish upon dish, drum upon fife,/Means in itself nothing". He is talking about "days" but the sentiment could be applied equally well to his

words. It is a most disappointing poem and one's disappointment is heightened by the comparative excellence of those few passages in which the poet is feeling and remembering with his heart as well as with his head. The canto in memory of Dylan Thomas, parts of canto XVII and canto XII in which the poet relives his Oxford days—these remind us of the poet that Mr. MacNiece was before the *Zeitgeist* got him by the throat.

The Pen in Exile is a collection of stories, articles and poems by writers of fourteen nationalities who have lost their "natural and indigenous audience". Living in exile for a variety of reasons, they find it difficult to achieve publication in translation, and the patient efforts of Mr. Paul Tabori and his associates have at last produced an anthology of their writings. Poetry in translation is never satisfying and the poetry section is the weakest part of the book. The only poets who survive translation are Marie Under, Joseph Wittlin, Vintila Horia and Jose Carner. Much of the prose, however, is excellent and the venture deserves the support of all who value contemporary literature.

B. Evan Owen.

Poetry Awards 1954 (Stanford University Press : London, Geoffrey Cumberlege, 24s.).

Poetry Awards 1954 is the sixth annual volume in the Borestone Mountain Series. This series could do a great deal for both poets and poetry magazines throughout the entire English-speaking world by introducing them to a wider public, and by encouraging, as it does, with valuable money prizes, what is easily the most unremunerative form of creative activity. The sponsors are to be congratulated upon their vision and sense of purpose.

It is unfortunate that the editors of these anthologies, which should contain the best poems from all the little magazines printed in English, seem to be failing to achieve the real purpose of the Poetry Awards project by limiting their field largely to American publications. Perhaps there have been practical difficulties in obtaining copies of other magazines, but I feel sure that they could be overcome. Of the sixty-six poems in the 1954 volume (excluding the undergraduate section), four are by British poets, one by a Canadian poet, and sixty-one by American poets. Even if it is conceded that the United States has a higher standard than any

other country—and we know it has far more magazines—would the editors honestly claim that this is truly representative of the poetry being written today? It is not insignificant that three of the four poems by British poets were taken from American magazines. In fact the only British magazines to be represented are *Poetry Quarterly, Outposts* and *The Window.* Was there really nothing worth inclusion from the following British publications—*Poetry and Poverty, English, The Poet, Fortnightly, Poetry Review, Stand, Listen, Zebra, Departure, Platform, The Glass* or *Artisan*—or to go further afield, from *Northern Review* (Canada), *Canadian Poetry Magazine, Southerly* (Australia), or the New Zealand magazines? It is to be hoped that some attempt will be made to widen the editorial scope in the future, for the Borestone Mountain project is far too important to be restricted to the United States.

Having said that (and it is time someone said it), I should like to make it clear that, judged as a collection of American poetry, *Poetry Awards* 1954 is of high standard, the emphasis being upon lyrical work. British readers of the volume will be interested to discover what is happening in poetry on the other side of the Atlantic and will make the acquaintance of some admirable poets. The first prize of $300 has been awarded to the late Robert P. Tristram Coffin for his lyric *A White Sloop Walks the Woods* and no-one could quarrel with the choice. Elizabeth Coatsworth has taken second place with *Night Wind in Spring* in the face of some severe competition from Sara Van Alstyne Allen, Cid Corman, Peter Viereck, Leah Bodine Drake, Amanda Benjamin Hall, Adrienne Cecile Rich and Richard Wilbur. Laurie Lee has won the third prize with *Boy in Ice* and a special award has been given to Allen Tate for *The Swimmers.* Charles G. Bell, Alan Donovan, May Sarton and Harold Vinal also deserve to be mentioned for their contributions.

ANTHONY NEWMAN.

Dylan Thomas: Derek Stanford (Neville Spearman, 15s.).
The Peaceable Kingdom: Jon Silkin (Chatto & Windus, 6s.).

FEW poets during the last twenty years have been the subject of so much argument amongst readers and critics as Dylan Thomas. Since the publication of his first book in 1935 so many conflicting and confusing judgments have been pronounced upon his work by reputable critics that the poetry-reading public may be

excused for its uncertainty in regard to his real stature as a poet. Nor did the eulogies that appeared after his death in 1953 clarify the position to any appreciable extent. In his recent study of Dylan Thomas's poetry and prose, Mr. Derek Stanford has, therefore, performed an important task.

Those who have had some difficulty in understanding Dylan Thomas will be encouraged to learn that until 1949 Mr. Stanford found that Thomas's "meaning was too obscure and his style too obfuscated" to attract his interest. It is precisely because he himself has experienced this difficulty,) and he is one of the most imaginative of exploratory critics) and is aware of the ordinary reader's perplexities that Mr. Stanford is so helpful and enlightening, for throughout the book he concentrates upon the meaning of the poems and the central ideas around which they were woven.

There is no critical jargon to conceal an inability to come to grips with isolated lines or images, and no evasion of the fact that the dominating feature of the poetry is Thomas's sexual interpretation of life. When, owing to the inconsistency of the images encountered, he fails to arrive at meaning, he is honest enough to admit it, but he does not hesitate to express his own opinion as to what the poet intended. Such obscurities, he suggests, "are the product of a mind whose imagination was so far ahead of its intelligence that sometimes the latter was outstripped completely; it is then that we get, not light but darkness—a poetic darkness, if you will . . .".

His examination of the methods, devices and use of idiom by which Thomas achieved his effects will be of particular value, and his treatment of the later poems will assist readers in assessing for themselves what has been lost to us by the poet's early death. No-one who is concerned with English poetry can afford to miss Mr. Stanford's study.

It is extremely rare for a poet to create a personal myth in his first volume, yet this is what Mr. Jon Silkin has succeeded in doing in *The Peaceable Kingdom*. True, it could hardly be described as a comprehensive myth, and it is difficult to see how it can be developed so as to serve as a valid basis for creative work in the future—I fear that it might rapidly be exhausted in its present form —but there can be no doubt that it is adequate to all the demands made upon it here, and it gives this book an unmistakable unity. Though his poems are readily accessible, the author provides us with the key when he says that he uses animals as symbols "because I can find no other way of expressing so potently man's pain", and the symbolic pattern is presented in the opening poem :

"The animals in my poems go into the ark.
There are two scrolls on the doors as they go
Which they cannot read. They are blessed for they walk
in the dark
The good dark and the last dark, and they know
That human beings will hate them wherever they go."

Several critics have already remarked, accurately enough, that Mr. Silkin's attitude to life, as exhibited in *The Peaceable Kingdom,* tends to be over-simplified and that his poems are lacking in technique, but it should be remembered that he is attempting to develop a style completely his own, without falling back upon mere technical tricks or a complicated syntax (and one must respect him for that). Whether the academic critics approve his style or not, the question remains—"Are the poems successful?"—and with certain exceptions the answer can only be "Yes". The poetry provides its own justification. There are some very moving poems in this collection, but *Death of a Son* shows just how effective Mr. Silkin's method is :

"And then slowly the eye stopped looking
Inward. The silence rose and became still.
The look turned to the outer place and stopped,
With the birds still shrilling around him.
And as if he could speak

He turned over on his side with his one year
Red as a wound
He turned over as if he could be sorry for this
And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like stones,
and he died."

A new poet has undeniably arrived on the scene; it will be interesting to see what direction he will take from this point.

HOWARD SERGEANT.

Other Publications Received :

Mountain of Beauty : William Irving Wood (Stockwell, 2s. 6d.).
We Must Alter All the Words : John Manson (Aberdeen University Literary Society, unpriced).
The Old Ladies of Newington : Peter Bladen (Meanjin Press, 10s. 6d.).
With a Hawk's Quill : James Picot (Meanjin Press, 10s. 6d.).